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Israeli Officer Called Rigid, Trigger-Happy

The man directly in charge of Israel's punitive expedition against Palestine Liberation Organization strongholds in Lebanon, Maj. Gen. Rafael Eitan, is a cocky, singleminded soldier who scoffs at peaceful negotiations to achieve national goals. This is the confidential assessment of U.S. intelligence analysts.

Eitan is a latter-day George Patton, who "has faith in the strength of his forces and knows total victory can be achieved," the psychological profile says of the Israeli chief of staff. "He is not concerned with the nuances of territorial prerogatives: winner takes all and the enemy who loses the battle loses the war and relinquishes all rights to his possessions."

The confidential profile, one of a series on Middle East leaders obtained by my associate Indy Badhwar, is not flattering to Eitan. He is characterized as a rather simpleminded, trigger-happy warrior, who, at the age of 50, "has not matured beyond the young officer of a parachutist's mentality."

The assessment says Eitan is "happy in planning and leading bat-

ties," and continues: "He is unaware of the costs to men's lives and the financial strain on his country and allies, because he is too identified with the game rather than the purpose He is the center of his world, with little sensitivity to others in his environment except those who, through need for his strength, can communicate with him."

One Israeli leader who reportedly can communicate with Eitan is Prime Minister Menachem Begin, whose hardline policies please the general. Insofar as he thinks about politics at all, Eitan appears to share Begin's view that Israel must depend for survival on her own military might rather than the diplomatic support of friends.

One reason Eitan admires Begin, the intelligence profile suggests, is that "rigidity in purpose and thought are to him [Eitan] signs of commitment and strength." Those who propose non-military solutions as instruments of Israeli national policy "baffle" the general.

Basically, Eitan is described as a skillful, loyal, dedicated fighting man, who "needs only an order [to] be off to solve the problem in a military manner," the profile states, adding: "The more daring the operation, the more attractive; the closer personal contact with the enemy, the better. He would be unhappy dropping bombs or serving as an artillery officer lobbing shells. The smell of battle is attractive and necessary."

Like "Blood-and-Guts" Patton, the political naif who was the most flamboyant, and perhaps most effective, American combat commander in World War II, Eitan "wants" no ambiguity left to put the victory or defeat in doubt," the report concludes.

"He knows political issues intellectually, but feels that talks and discussions are too slow to settle problems," the profile continues. Blood and battle, Eitan believes, "are more decisive than conferences and negotiations." He seeks combat "with little concern for the purpose of battle or the political objectives."

Many Israelis see Eitan as another Moshe Dayan, but this overlooks the political astuteness of the late general. Dayan's political strength was based on his military success as well as his personal charisma. He also suffered the political consequences of his poor showing in the 1973 war.

Unlike Dayan, Eitan has never experienced military defeat, and it is doubtful that he knows—or cares—enough about purely political matters to withstand a setback.

Footnote: I reported last month on a similar intelligence profile of Menachem Begin. It foretold his response to the PLO problem in southern Lebanon, noting that Begin believes "any expression of curbs on the sanctity of the Jewish state, or the potential Arab infringement on Israeli territory, [should be] dealt with severely."